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Gladstone, William Ewart

The Right Honorable

W.E. Gladstone

London

1889

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THE RIGHT HON.

W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.,

ON

*Cottage Gardens and Fruit Culture.*

ADDRESS BY MR. GLADSTONE AT THE ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF  
FRUIT, FLOWERS, AND VEGETABLES OF THE HAWARDEN  
AND BUCKLEY HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY, IN THE  
GROUNDS OF HAWARDEN CASTLE, ON THE  
22ND OF AUGUST, 1889.

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THE  
RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.,

*ON COTTAGE GARDENS AND FRUIT CULTURE.*

ADDRESS BY MR. GLADSTONE AT THE ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF FRUIT,  
FLOWERS, AND VEGETABLES OF THE HAWARDEN AND BUCKLEY  
HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY, IN THE GROUNDS OF HAWARDEN CASTLE,  
ON THE 22ND OF AUGUST, 1889.

THE reasons why I rejoice in institutions of this kind I may state very briefly. In the first place, although I am a Free Trader, and a thorough Free Trader, yet I rejoice in everything that increases the domestic produce of the soil, and I have not the least doubt that an institution of this kind helps greatly towards turning the land to the best account. Then unquestionably the possession and cultivation of good gardens greatly increases the comfort especially of the cottagers of this land. And in the third place, these institutions afford an excellent scope for the bringing together of all classes of the community. We have got here, I am happy to say, the cottagers very strong in the exhibition; we have also the farmers and the people of leisure and property; and you have an excellent committee, headed by Mr. Taylor, who have bestowed great pains and care in organising this institution and arranging for the flower show, without which care, and the establishment of good and sound rules, a thing of this kind could not be brought to flourish. I am happy to say that we are going on from year to year getting on firmer and more solid grounds, and

increasing. Of course, we vary with the season in certain respects. For instance, this has not been very favourable for the exhibition of fruit in consequence of the nature of the season and of the fact that the date of the show has not coincided with the ripening of every fruit. But we advance, and of this advance we are able to give the very best proof, because there is a very considerable increase this year over the number of last year, and the number of last year was decidedly larger than it had been upon any former occasion. In fact, this has now become a thoroughly rooted and established local institution; and while it is to be regarded as of very great interest as a local institution, I think also the classes of institution to which it belongs are of very great importance. They are of importance undoubtedly to cottagers, and to cottagers especially where they have gardens attached to their cottages. Now what I rather hope is that we are in advance of most parts of the country as to the proportion of our cottages that have efficient gardens attached to them. I hope the time will come when there will be no such thing as a cottage in this neighbourhood without a good and efficient garden, because the value of them is very great.

You hear a lot about allotments. Allotments are very good things, but efficient gardens of proper size are a great deal better things. Why, in the first place, if an allotment is half a mile or a mile from a labouring man's house, that is a distance for him or his wife to travel, and it is an addition to labour; it is an expenditure of time, and it may entail a good deal of fatigue. In the second place, in the case of an allotment he cannot go into the allotment at all times of the day. But in the garden the man's wife or children are capable of being useful, and can go there every five or ten minutes or quarter of an hour at a time. And lastly,

what grows in the garden is more secure than what grows in the allotment, because there is somebody to look after it; and the consequence of that is, so far as I have seen, that allotments are made useful for vegetables, but allotments for fruit and flowers are very rare indeed, and would require some peculiar organisation in order to enable them to be supplied in that way.

I am no practical authority in these matters at all. My life has been spent in other affairs. I have never pretended to be a practical authority, but what I have tried to do is this—to direct the mind of the community to these subjects, by quoting people as far as I am able who are practical authorities, and by, at any rate, enabling them to go to sources—to persons who have themselves laboured in this important field, and then form their own judgment for themselves.

Now, I observe that the whole of the branches of an institution of this kind may be comprised under the name of the small culture. In France it is called *petite culture*—the small culture—as opposed to the larger operations of the farmer. You have here to-day, we have seen, an exhibition of vegetables, of flowers, of fruit. Then we have seen some bee culture. I believe it is not a very good year for honey. And we have seen, what does not appear to be entirely within the same province—but, notwithstanding, I have no doubt it is very useful—we have seen specimens of sewing and knitting—female indoor labours which are no doubt of very great importance to the community. And, finally, for the first time you have had an exhibition of butter. Now, not upon my own authority—though I suppose we all of us know bad butter when we see it—but upon better authority than mine, I can tell you this, that the Hawarden butter, of which specimens were exhibited to-day—about twenty

specimens—is pronounced to be extremely good as compared with butter produced in other parts of the country. I have heard of one large show, and that in the northern part of England, too—I will not mention the name because while we are paying compliments to ourselves we do not wish to be rude to any one else—but I say it is in the North, because in the North they are supposed to be rather shrewd fellows; and yet the Hawarden butter is declared to be decidedly better than the butter in this show to which I have referred.

Besides these, there are other points which are of great interest. Although the pig is an animal hardly to be named to ears polite on account of his dirty manners, yet he is an extremely useful animal to the community, and he likewise constitutes a very important matter in connection with the minor descriptions of productive industry which may be pursued by cottagers as well as by farmers.

There is also, of course, the care of poultry. Now there is a very shrewd woman living not far from here whom I asked a little about her hens, having always observed her hens were very nice, and I asked her how many eggs they laid in the year. She could not tell me exactly, but she made it about one hundred eggs. That shows the great importance of the choice of kinds, which applies, of course, to live things and dead things alike, because I have here a book written for the purpose of improving the care of poultry in Ireland—a book called *The Freeman's Handbook*, and which is published at *The Freeman's Journal* office in Dublin—wherein they give an account of a multitude of different descriptions of poultry, and actually a kind of poultry which will lay from two hundred to two hundred and forty eggs in the year. It is an important thing to make good selections of broods. I have no doubt the

person to whom I have referred, though perhaps not very intelligent, has very good poultry, but it seems that still better poultry is to be had. These societies have that advantage among others, that they enable everybody to learn from his neighbour. Nobody, or very few, are perfect in their pursuits. I am sure I am not in mine. Very few people indeed are. It is all nonsense to say that they go on as they are, content with what they have done. Whatever we do, we ought to do it as well as we can. If we want to do it in the best manner, to compare and communicate with one another is of very great importance. I will send this book to one of the reading-rooms here, that other people may study it if they like.

Now I want to say a few words about the subject—selecting one of these branches—about the subject of fruit-growing; because, in some points of view, that is the most important of them all.

As to flowers, Mr. Bingley Bruce, who has been taking a useful and active part in regard to them, in some criticisms says, in the first place, that a very great excess is growing up in the use of flowers connected with funerals. I am not sure that there is not some truth in that—at any rate, among the wealthy people. I am not speaking of the beautiful custom of growing flowers on graves; but cramming with flowers graves that are going to be filled up, I do not think is very wise. This gentleman says there is a very great waste of flowers altogether.

I don't know how that may be, but I wish to say something about fruit, because that is a very important industry, and an industry growing continually more and more important, as I will show you.

In the year 1839 there were about 90,000 acres of fruit-trees growing in this country; in the year 1872 they had

grown to 172,000 acres; and they are now estimated by a very able gentleman, whose works I have often quoted to you—Mr. Whitehead, who writes in the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*—they are now estimated by Mr. Whitehead at 214,000 acres.

Now 214,000 acres is a very considerable acreage indeed, and I doubt whether that includes all the small gardens of the country; but some people began to be alarmed, and a gentleman of the name of Mott has published an article this year in what is called *The New Review*, for the month of February, which is entitled "The Fruit-growing Folly."

In this article he says some things which are, no doubt, sensible enough, but I do not believe that fruit-growing is a folly. What he says is that the farmers have been too easily misled into it. I have heard many complaints or criticisms upon the British farmer, but I must say that among his faults I never heard that going in too rapidly for new things was conspicuous. I have heard him found fault with in other directions, but in my opinion he is quite competent to defend himself against any danger on that side, and I doubt very much whether there is any ground for this charge. However, that is one of the things Mr. Mott says. He goes on and attacks particularly the cultivation of apples. What does he say about apples? At about eightpence a pound—that is what he considers a reasonable price, the ordinary price you will judge much better than I can, I have never bought any—that is what he says is the ordinary price—he says, "What are your apples? Five-sixths of them are water;" and therefore he considered that your apples really cost five times eightpence, six times eightpence—that is to say, 4s.—the pound, which seems rather dear for apples. He complains that there are five-sixths of them

water, and all the water he thinks is of no good at all, and ought not to be reckoned.

Well, now, when I read this criticism of Mr. Mott's, I began to think, Is there nothing else besides apples that is made up of water, or considerably made up of water? Perhaps it would not be civil and polite to ask one of you gentlemen, "Have you got any water in the composition of your body?" Therefore I will speak for myself, because it is perfectly well known by chemists and philosophers how much of the human body is water.

The last time I was weighed I weighed fourteen stone—I beg your pardon, twelve stone—fourteen pounds a stone; that comes to, I think, 168 pounds. Now I know very well, from what I have read in books of authority, that out of that 168 pounds something like 120 is water; and that which happens to me (and I am of as solid stuff as other people), I believe you have in the same proportion; and I believe the gentleman who wrote the article, Mr. Mott himself, is three-fourths of him probably water.

Apples may have a little more water than we have; turnips have a little more than apples; but still they are very useful things, and I thought that a good deal of the water which is in the apples went to help to make up the water which is in the human body.

But there is more than this. This gentleman says we have no power of increasing the consumption of fruit except by giving it at a low price.

That opens a very curious subject. You must, he says, give it at a lower price; and thereby he infers that it won't be increased, because you do not want to sell it for less than you get for it now. And that is his doctrine. You can only have an increase in the consumption of fruit by selling it at a lower price. The demand otherwise, except for the rich

people, which is a small portion, is a fixed demand, and you cannot extend it. This is an interesting question, and let us see how far there is any truth in it.

Is it a fact that there is no power for increasing the demand for fruit in this country? I say, there is a very great power of increasing it, and it is increasing continually, and I will give you a proof of the increase. In 1839 there were 71,000 bushels of apples imported into this country; in 1869 that had grown from 71,000 to 491,000; and in 1888 that had grown from 491,000 to 3,800,000 bushels of apples—of a value, if I remember rightly, of £800,000, or something of that kind.

How has all that increase come about? Now I observe that that increase has been almost all in foreign apples. You see that the importation has increased more than thirty-fold, but we have no such great increase in the growth of domestic apples.

Now I want the Englishman to rouse his own spirit and compete freely with the foreigner where he can, and he can do a great deal in this. There is a great deal yet to be done, and it is true that sometimes you may find greater cheapness to the consumer accomplishing a large extension of consumption; but there are other causes that operate too. The number who want luxuries and comforts, and who have the means of paying for them, is rapidly growing in this country. We still have poor and destitute people in this country. Much we regret it, and we trust they may be diminished, and trust there may be no such thing as a destitute person in the country after a time. But, however that may be, there is no doubt at all of this—that not only those whom you call rich people, and very rich people, but that middle class, and the class able to consume considerably in comforts and even luxuries, rapidly grows in this country,

and will have more, and that is the reason that apples have increased to the 3,800,000 bushels that are imported into this country.

But pray remember that it is a plausible thing to say the consumption will not increase unless the price is lowered. In the first place it is not true, because it will increase if the consumer has better means.

We have a great deal more meat consumed in this country now than fifty years ago, but the price is higher. How has the increase gone on with the increase of price? Why, because happily there are many more people able to buy meat and to eat it; but, besides that, it does not at all follow that because the consumer gets the article cheaper, the grower gets less for it.

I will show you why. There are a multitude of things besides the price given to the grower which make up the price in the market to the consumer. It is a long time very often before an article gets from the grower to the person who is to be the consumer. The grower sometimes has not got a good arrangement for the security of his capital. Sometimes he does not know what other growers are doing, and associations such as this would enable you to see what your neighbours are doing, and get a lesson from them. Such associations do not exist in all parts of the country. Associations of growers are means by which better articles are produced at lower cost by the better economy of the means of production. In the same way journals which circulate knowledge upon these subjects are of immense utility. They tell people things that they did not know before, and enable them to grow things that they could not grow before.

I am no practical authority, but I am going to quote a journal which is supposed to be a practical authority, *The*



*Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardening.* It is a small thing I am going to quote, but it is interesting. In *The Journal of Horticulture* of October 25, 1888, I read a letter from a gentleman of the name of Kearn, and he says this: "I gave an account last year of grafting apples upon a pear-tree." You would say, "What is the use of that?" But if you will listen to Mr. Kearn you will see what the use of it is. He says: "This year I have continued the experiments, and have grafted 26 scions of good apples upon such pear-trees as were unfruitful or bore worthless pears. Twenty-one have taken strong shoots."

Old age is a very awkward thing for men, as some of us begin to feel, and it is an awkward thing for pear-trees, for they are very apt to leave off bearing; but here is a curious fact—that when the pear-tree has ceased to be fit to bear pears, it is fit to bear apples. Not without being helped. It must be helped by having the apples grafted into it. If that is true, I can only say it is a thing worth knowing. I daresay there are those among you who have got pear-trees. We have in our garden pear-trees which are not bearing pears; and if they can bear apples, it is a very good thing. I only quote this as an example of the utility of circulating information upon these things.

Well, then, there is another thing, and that is the arrangement for distributing fruits—the organisation of middlemen to buy the fruit from the grower, and to carry it to the market. That may be very good or very bad; and judging from what I read in this *Journal* and elsewhere, there is a good deal yet to be done in that way for getting fruit economically, and safely and well, from the grower to the market in which it is to be sold and given to the consumer.

There is another thing which appears not to have

been so much studied in this country as in other countries, the picking and storing of it. A great deal of the fruit (and the same thing applies still more to flowers) is spoiled through bad and inefficient packing or sending to market. All these things are things the nature of which is important as the pursuit is more extensively followed, because when things are done on a large scale it is more easy to do them methodically and well, and therefore progress in these things may be slight, but it may be very real notwithstanding; and I believe that for progress and for cheapness and better production in that way—that is to say, for selling in the market at lower prices without any loss to the grower, but, on the contrary, with gain to the grower—it is quite possible, and indeed very probable, that there is a great deal of room still remaining. I mention these particular heads in which there may be great economy still to be practised—economy in means of bringing fruit to the market, and of great benefit to both parties, both to the grower and to the consumer.

Now, on this matter of apple-growing I will endeavour to illustrate what I have said, and I will quote the testimony of Mr. Whitehead, whom I believe to be a good authority, whom I have quoted to you before, and whose testimony has never, that I know of, been confuted. Mr. Whitehead says, from returns of prices made for apples in 1838, 1839, and 1840, that on a large fruit farm in Kent—it is true, though, 1840 was a very abundant year—but it appears that the average price to the grower in 1838, 1839, and 1840, for the three years, was 3s. 1½d. a bushel. That is what a grower got for them. Since then, as you see, there has been an immense increase of consumption. Does the grower get less now? No. According to Mr. Whitehead, in his article in *The Agricultural*

*Journal* called "Fifty Years of Fruit-Farming," the average price of apples to the growers for the last three years is at least five shillings per bushel; so that you see there may be a state of things in which the consumer—for I do not believe apples to be dearer, but cheaper to the consumer—in which the consumer gets the benefit and the grower also; because the means, the machinery, for transmitting the commodity from the grower to the community are so much cheapened and improved. This is all very well to warn people against the fruit-growing folly. I will quote one more passage from Mr. Whitehead. He says that upon the whole, taking an average of the last ten years, it is believed that fruit-growing has paid far better than any other agricultural industry. During that period, unhappily, many branches of agriculture have not paid at all; yet there have been good times—and we hope there will be good times again. But I am speaking of the relative position of these pursuits, and I am as far as any one from wishing to see wild, rash, violent, and ill-considered changes; still it does appear that there is every rational ground for extending this important industry. It is a most important industry; and let me point out that with flowers for the most part they come and they are gone, but fruit has a double character.

Fruit is a ripened commodity, ready for consumption, as all the boys know, and some of the grown-up people.

But, besides that, it is a raw material for manufacturers. It is manufactured into jams and preserves of one kind and another, and perhaps you will be surprised—I was surprised when I found it to be stated upon what appears to be good authority—to hear that there are 60,000 people (that means 60,000 heads of families, probably representing a population of some hundreds of thousands) in this country employed in the manufacture of jam.

There is a possibility of immense extension, and why? Because of the enormous advantage we have now enjoyed for some years in this country of getting the cheapest sugar in the world.

Do you know the change that has taken place in the price of sugar since I was young? You get for twopence now as much good sugar as you got for eightpence then. There has been no such revolution, I think, in the price of any commodity of life. One cause of the cheapening of the raw material is that happily we have been able to abolish altogether the Customs duty on sugar, and the consequence of that is, we have the best sugar market in the world, and having our sugar a great deal cheaper than the people of other countries we are manufacturing the jam for them.

Whenever you hear of the Sugar Duties Convention, and bounties upon sugar in foreign countries, I advise you to look very sharply into all the plans and schemes which seek to go in the direction of making sugar dearer, because it will not only mean the narrowing of your comforts, but the restriction of your trade, and the diminution of your employment.

With such a commodity at your doors you may say for such fruits as will be grown in this country that there will be an appetite; there will be means enough of making it into preserves or jams, and the world at large will have plenty of appetite and plenty of means of consumption of all the jam that is made.

Those are my views generally. I really believe that this is a very interesting and important subject. I do not think it is going to cause a revolution in the state of British agriculture; not at all. British agriculture no doubt must depend not upon the smaller but upon the greater culture, upon the production of the great staples on which mankind

must live, because though jam is a very good thing, yet mankind would not live upon jam. It would not take the place of meat, it would not take the place of bread, nor of the excellent butter which we have been looking at in the tent to-day. But these institutions are good institutions, and they are good for the reasons that I have told you. I have omitted from among those reasons what I ought to have included—they are very good because they enable every one of you who has a garden, who grows fruits, flowers, and vegetables, to do that better than he did before by watching his neighbours who did it better than he. There is no end to the improvement that may be practised in these things. A career is open to all, and an institution of this kind is an institution that will help you to prosecute it more and more for the advantage of and satisfaction of yourselves and of your neighbours.

**END OF  
TITLE**